Abstract

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) (collectively referred to as the Services) are responding to applications from Simpson Resource Company (Simpson) for an Incidental Take Permit (ITP) and Enhancement of Survival Permit (ESP), respectively, as authorized under Section 10 of the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA). Simpson has initiated efforts to expand and improve its aquatic species conservation and ecosystem management on its forestlands in Humboldt and Del Norte Counties, California. Simpson's aquatic species management activities have resulted in the development of a comprehensive multiple species Aquatic Habitat Conservation Plan/Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances (AHCP/CCAA). The AHCP/CCAA was prepared to support the ITP and ESP applications to the Services.

Simpson's ITP application to NMFS, if approved, would allow the incidental take of several fish species listed as threatened under the ESA that may be impacted by otherwise lawful timber harvesting and forest management activities conducted on Simpson's lands in northern California. These species are coho salmon (Southern Oregon/Northern California Coast Evolutionary Significant Unit [ESU]), chinook salmon (California Coastal ESU), and steelhead (Northern California ESU). The ITP application to NMFS and the ESP application to USFWS would also cover other, currently unlisted, aquatic species should they become listed in the future. These unlisted species are chinook salmon (Southern Oregon and Northern California Coastal ESU, Upper Klamath/Trinity Rivers ESU), steelhead (Klamath Mountains Province ESU), coastal cutthroat trout, rainbow trout, southern torrent salamander, and tailed frog.

Simpson could conduct timber harvesting and other covered activities under the proposed AHCP/CCAA, but could also conduct these activities without the AHCP/CCAA. In this document, the environmental effects of implementing Simpson's proposed AHCP/CCAA are compared to the effects of managing without the AHCP/CCAA. Three other alternatives are also considered.

The AHCP/CCAA would likely provide improved aquatic habitat conditions relative to the No Action Alternative. Although aquatic habitat conditions (and therefore anadromous fish populations) are also anticipated to improve under the No Action Alternative relative to existing conditions, the improvements are expected to be greater under the proposed AHCP/CCAA and other alternatives. In many cases, these improvements would benefit a broader range of species than just the covered AHCP/CCAA species. As described in Simpson's proposed AHCP/CCAA, the impacts of take to listed covered species are minimized and mitigated to the maximum extent practicable. Impacts to unlisted covered species are avoided or minimized to the extent that any authorized take, should the species become listed in the future, will not appreciably reduce the likelihood of survival and recovery in the wild of the species.